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### Grimoire 1989

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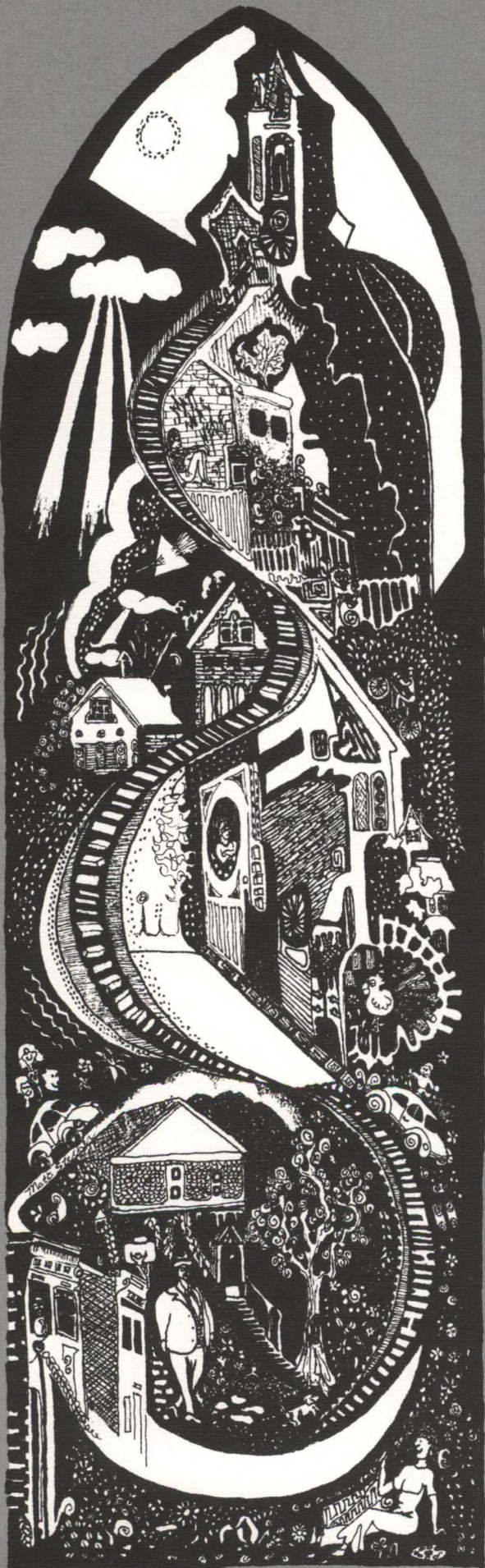
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# Giulio



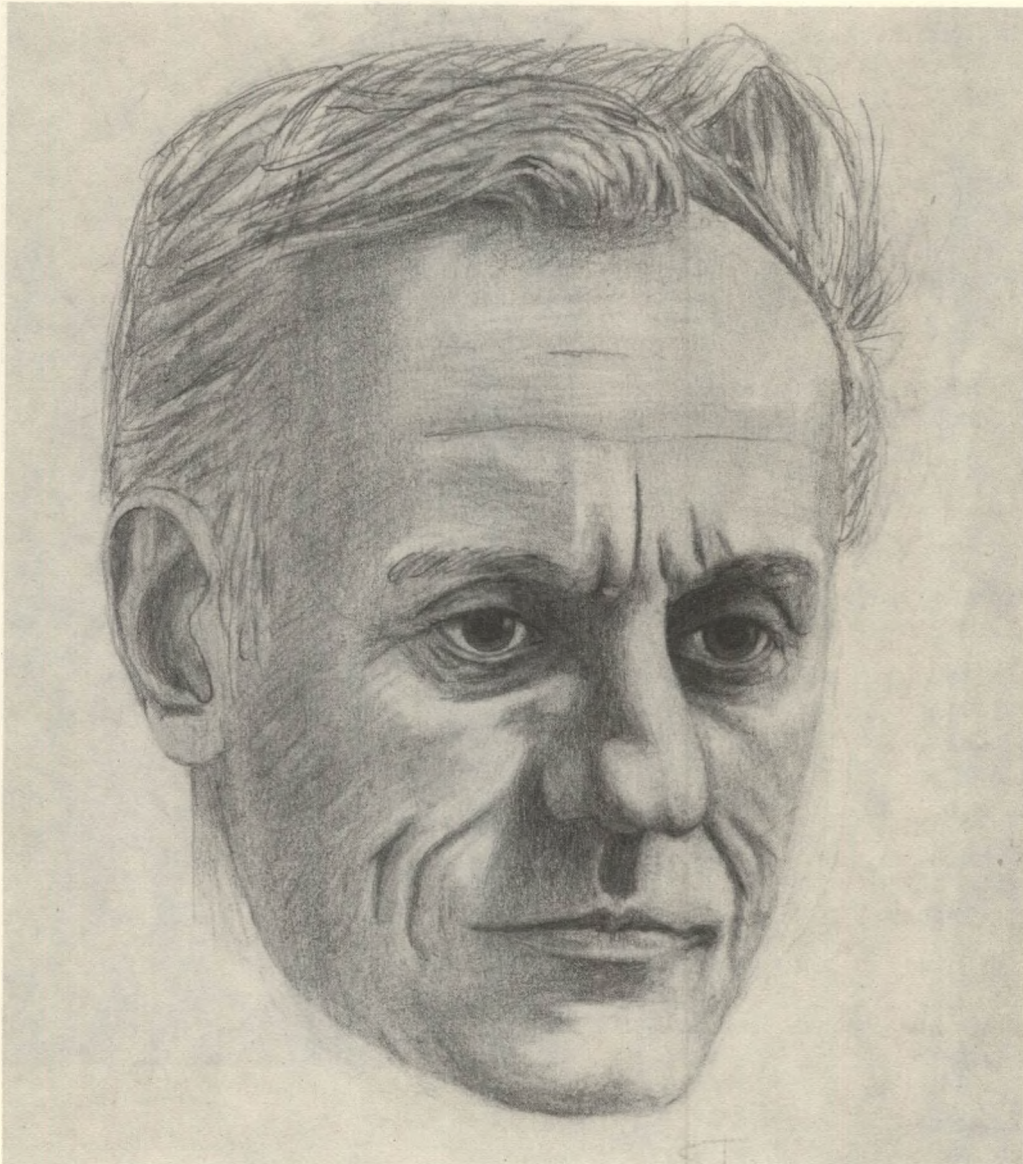


The editorial staff proudly presents the 1989 *Grimoire*. This is our 19th issue, and there will be more to come. Each year the best efforts of La Salle's student community are compiled into this "magic book". The editorial staff would like to honor three individuals from the La Salle community for their influence on the students' growth at La Salle.

#### IN MEMORIAM

This year La Salle University lost an uncommon instructor. Brother Richard Hawley, F.S.C. was, and to many still is, the most highly regarded educator in the Biology department at La Salle. Because of his reputation, Brother Richard was awarded the Lindback award for distinguished teaching in 1976. His responsibility to his students (in all disciplines — science, humanities and business) did not end when the bell rang. Brother Hawley's concern for the extra-curricular growth of students was demonstrated in his advisement of one of La Salle's fraternities. On April 28, 1989, Brother Hawley will be commemorated by La Salle's science community in the bestowal of the annual Holroyd Award. Brother Richard Hawley will be greatly missed by those who knew him, but his contributions will never be forgotten.

Kathleen Boyd served as an editor of the *Grimoire* from 1979 to 1983. After graduating from La Salle, Kathleen went on to publish (as many editors have) short stories, essays and poems. What was special about Kathleen Boyd was her never-ending faith in the magazine. Last year, she sent a letter describing the "disaster struggles" that the students faced to keep the *Grimoire* going. This year, her mother informed the editors of her unexpected death this January. Her mother commented that Kathleen "was proud of the *Grimoire's* quality since her graduation." We hope Kathleen would have been proud of this issue as well.



— Scott Jermyn

*"Old men ought to be explorers  
Here and there does not matter  
We must be still and still moving  
Into another intensity..."*

*T.S. Eliot, "East Coker"*

For over forty years, Professor Claude Koch has taught at La Salle University. During this time, he has proved himself to be not only a dedicated teacher, but also a distinguished literary craftsman. His novels, short stories, poems, and plays have earned him accolades throughout the country. Moreover, through his untiring dedication, he has inspired generations of students in creative writing courses and many others who have come to his office in search of guidance. Many of those students have contributed their creative work to the *Grimoire*, and he has been a patron of the magazine since its inception. Though he retires after this semester, Professor Koch will continue to remain an important part of the La Salle community through his recently-awarded position of Professor Emeritus. With this issue, we would like to thank him for his selfless energy and celebrate his graceful humility.



## A Castle In North Wales

I

On the margin of the Irish Sea,  
Stands a castle by a hill.  
Its silence echoes in my memory —  
An emblem of indifferent will.

II

In the shadowed churchyard on that mound  
She wandered huddled through the stones;  
I said her camera's clicking sounds  
Were bound to stir the bones.

Half-thinking she might follow me,  
I left without another word;  
I set out for my whispering sea  
To vision what I heard:

But only looked with muted glance  
At castle walls and moon-paled sand,  
Until a child formed a dance  
To music on the strand,

Then suddenly I heard brisk timbrels  
Ringing in forgotten rooms,  
And the swoosh of ladies all too nimble  
For their hot-pursuing grooms.

III

But this was just a borrowed dream  
Tripping through a barren mind;  
In memory there is no theme  
But proves the dreamer blind.

And now I wonder what she thought  
Trembling in that gust-filled place,  
And what it was she must have sought:  
A numbing warmth, a living grace

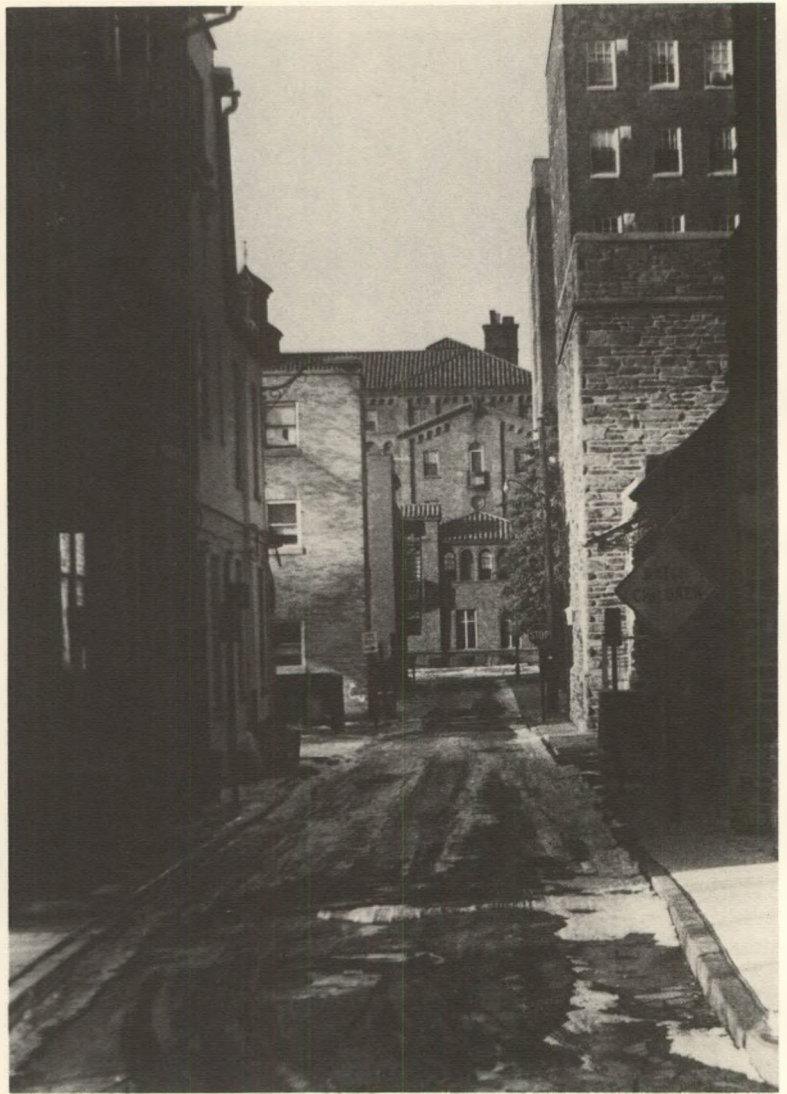
That dulled the sea's deep-furrowed swell  
And damned the stream of her regret.  
Or did she hear a chilling knell  
Whose echoes none forget?

Perhaps I only can pretend  
What she must feel beneath her skin;  
My dreams are bred by other men  
And vanish like the wind.

IV

On the margin of the Irish sea,  
Stands a castle by a hill.  
Its silence echoes in my memory —  
An emblem of indifferent will.

— Scott Jermyn



— Jim Hagen

## Five Minutes and Cigarette on Death Row

Even when they'd shaved my wrists I would not cry,  
But waited. I watched my faint smoke climb the wall,  
Stretch itself on the ceiling, curl into a ball,  
Then blow out the window and up to the sky.  
Men laboured, bringing me to this machine.  
I work to meet it with a colder strength.  
Steel knows no life; my flesh has not felt death,  
Though I have known them both, forced their mating  
By my own stark moments of creation.  
I watch small ashes pile between my feet.  
I can smell what the smell will be.  
Something does not come. Guards nod at last stations.  
In the last shrill five seconds they'll wet my skin.  
I do not know if the charge travels out, or in.

— Thomas Hempstead

## A Woman

I always loved the thought of her beauty,  
as all men should but most never do,  
in the opaque depths of the Irish Sea.  
Glimmering a thick green in the morning light,  
and lapping against the sea wall in the quiet of the night.

It's the constant murmur of her shoreline  
that draws the attention of my ear,  
to hear the subtle whispers and the silent cries  
of what the Irish and all other men should hold so dear.

— E. J. Halus, Jr.

## Winter Pier

Burned-out wharves —  
charred mossy-slick,  
like half-sunken tombs of stevedores,  
waterlogged black as wicks...

We clutch the iron rail,  
skim stranded stones,  
then huddle coats in frail  
defense for torpid bones.

Waves from steel-ruddered  
tugs crash the pier,  
rake the clouded gutters  
of swirling silt. I veer

to warmth in your sloping nape  
shadowed from my mouth;  
your collar flutters and drapes  
waves of a moiré blouse.

Jagged river troughs  
blur through strands of hair —  
our love's enough...  
to mock the choric Delaware

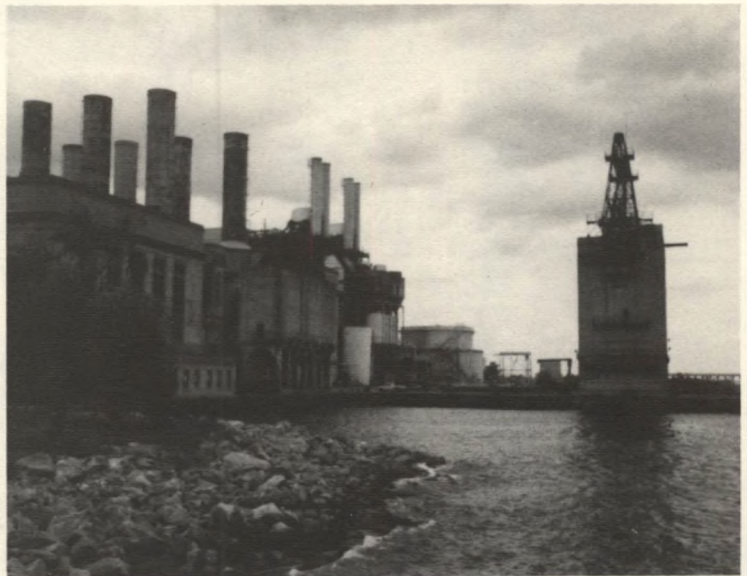
as close to death as two could dare.

— David Livewell

## Strong

The king of the island adjusted his crown  
His scepter was bared in a powerless hand  
With which he controlled the lives of millions.  
And no one seized the gold-plated scepter  
Of the monarch so weak (yet appearing so strong)  
And wearing a crown that did not fit.  
The reign was long but the king was old  
And tradition decreed that he stay on the throne  
No matter his mental condition.  
On an average day the king breathed his last  
And the death went unnoticed by his loyal subjects  
Then it was realized that kings are biodegradable.  
Under cover of darkness the king was removed  
From the dusty palace where once he had lived  
He was buried without ceremony yesterday.  
Today the inhabitants of the island  
Are loyal to another king;  
A king who seems to be healthy and strong.

— Tracey Hassell



— David Livewell



## Morning Song

It's fear that we embrace,  
taking it in like a child we wish  
unborn. All night we hug  
the quilt as though its drape  
could part us painfully,  
more easily than this  
weak tug-pull we know,  
that we can name.

At dawn the river light  
slants over us, shaping our bodies.  
What's lost in the safety of love?  
How I want to be alert,  
as afraid as a drinking animal  
relearning the river's dangerous tongue  
a thousand times. Towards day, and death,  
our small dreams raise their smaller voices  
and are gone.

— Frederick R. Bennett, Jr.

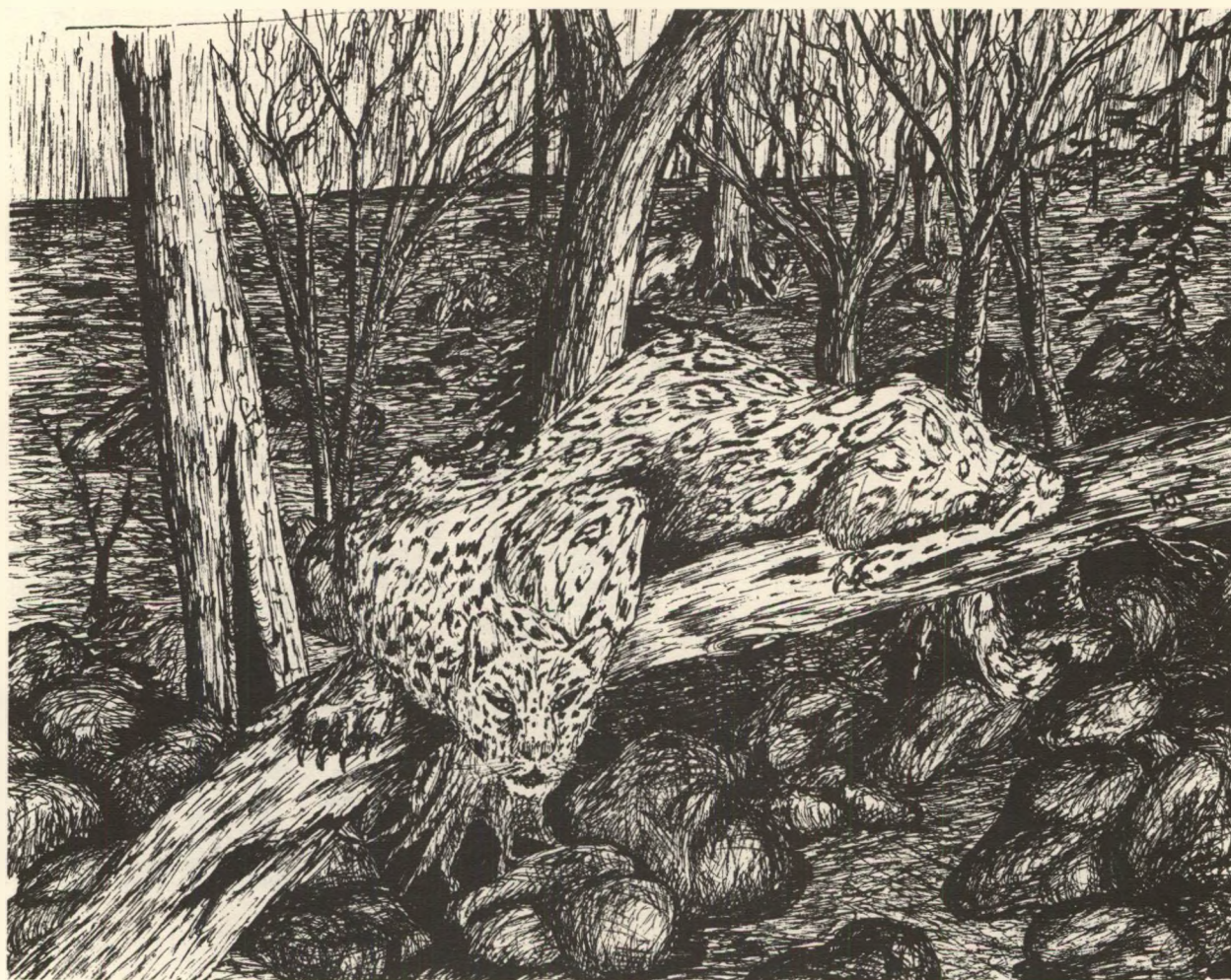
## Next Morning

All of the merciful summer night, you  
And I lay hidden in a cave of jewels.  
There was opal, and emerald in our cave,  
And the windows looked out on the sea.

Now light comes in at nine, And the last  
Diamond shivers beneath the dusty skin  
Of a glass of water on the shelf, throwing  
Pale highlights along your leg, across my back,  
Through your hair, and we are back in my room.  
I get up to make coffee,  
And feel the sun directly on my skin.

Daylight falls, like the soft paw of God  
Through the wilderness, received,  
By my new flesh, with fear.

— Thomas Hempstead



— Matt Stecher



## Rainy Day Poem

Solitary figures with umbrella limbs  
weave through the wet curtain  
across cement, soaked wood-brown.  
I follow their pattern without you.  
You did not come to see me today.  
You are home in a dry bed  
and I must perform the rain dance alone,  
swishing through puddles in my big sneakers,  
looking for your little boots,  
the color of coffee with cream,  
waiting for you to lean into me,  
snuggle into my floppy coat,  
picturing your yellow hair  
no longer glittering too-bright gold, but  
dimmed, dull as sand in the drenched greyness.  
We shuffle under my yawning umbrella,  
drifting through the encompassing curtain,  
caught between audience and stage,  
searching for the opening. But  
I would rather not find it,  
not wanting to face the lights, the stares,  
choosing instead to become lost  
with you in this wet weave.  
I try to put my arm around your thin waist and  
remember you are home  
in your flannel granny-gown under heavy blankets,  
the rain, only a whisper on your windowpane,  
and I am lost in the curtain, alone and longing.

— Edward Pettit



— DMB



— Jim Hagen

## After the Bath

You lowered me, crying, to the running water,  
My fingers clenched tightly to your thumb.  
(How briefly suds clung to your hands, Mother,  
Sponging flesh until your limbs were numb.)  
You bathed us all in evening's blue kitchen:  
Without complaint your shoulders took our pains,  
Absorbed our infant sobs. Your ashen skin  
Shrivelled in a bone-white sink, marred with stains.

Now tears are loosed in running beads; they mend  
Your aching limbs and ease your stiffened hands —  
But dreams for children, grown and gone, all end  
Like swirling suds that burst in fading bands,  
And your hopes, once fragile as new skin,  
Scar like seeping stains on porcelain.

— David Livewell



## Bert: The Rise and Fall of a Muppet Legend

Bert and Ernie were inarguably the greatest comedy duo of all time. Everything about that team — their timing, their routines — personified excellent comedy and has moved history to regard these two as comedic geniuses. Bert and Ernie. Ernie was the cute, short one with the funny laugh who got all the great lines and all the babes. Sure, he wasn't really that bright but he always seemed to con Bert out of that last jelly bean. Bert was the straight man and the real talent of the duo — the wise one who warned Ernie what would happen if he picked his nose or ate cookies in bed.

It's easy to remember Bert the way he used to be. That colorful, 100% polyester V-neck sweater over the snowy white turtleneck started a fashion trend that continues to this day in kindergartens throughout the nation. That lipless mouth, that bushy brow, that squeaky high-pitched voice, and that Don King hair-do on that cone-shaped head made up that image of higher common sense in which an army of preschoolers put their trust. That's the way Bert used to be and that's the way millions will always remember him.

But things changed drastically for Bert, and the little world he had made for himself and his disciples collapsed. It all started when Jim Henson led a muppet exodus out of public television to Hollywood. Bert, in a rare display of a lack of show-business prescience, scoffed at what he considered a ridiculously idealistic notion and chose to stay on Sesame Street with Ernie, Gordon, and Big Bird. Soon, however, things started falling apart on Sesame Street. First came the sudden death of Mr. Hooper — the shock took an emotional toll on Bert and it was months before he could enter a grocery store without breaking down. Then, unfortunately, the ratings of Sesame Street plummeted as Bert and Ernie realized that the public was bagging them in favor of their long-time rival Kermit the Frog. Finally, the behind-the-scenes scandals which were uncovered on the Sesame Street set took their toll on Bert. Gordon, everyone's father figure on the show, was involved in a highly-publicized paternity suit with Shelley Winters. Big Bird made a public announcement of his homosexuality, confessing that he had once been a chauffeur for Liberace. Bitter feuding over Ernie's increasingly growing drug problem contributed to the greatest comedy duo of all time splitting up. After the schism, Ernie moved his act to Vegas and, with the help of his long-time fan Frank Sinatra, he became the hottest thing to hit that town since Wayne Newton, giving the folks a show stocked with a 100-piece orchestra and nude dancing showgirls.

After the split, Bert was confident he could make it on his own. He did well for a while, but he eventually came to the conclusion that it was time to leave Sesame Street. Freed from his contract there, Bert was ready to broaden his horizons in the entertainment industry. The now-powerful Henson, still miffed at Bert's cynical comments, refused to

give him a chance in Hollywood, but Bert managed to hustle a few commercial jobs, movie cameos, and television appearances in New York. Things got tough in the celluloid market of the Big Apple, however, so Bert instead turned to the stage. He did a little Broadway but found it too grueling; he performed in summer stock but found it unsatisfying; he even starred in a run of "Hamlet" but couldn't shake off his funny-man stereotype and the show bombed. There was only one thing left for him to do: in desperation, Bert went to California for guest spots on "The Love Boat" and "Fantasy Island."

Even these appearances failed to stop the momentum of his career spiralling downward to an untimely demise. The offers stopped coming and Bert was forced to pound the pavements in search of acting jobs. Everywhere he went he was turned away with the same excuse: "You're just not in demand anymore. You're a comic — why don't you work the nightclub circuit?" But without Ernie, Bert's nightclub appearances floundered and he was soon shunned from that market. Unemployed and too proud to get any job outside of entertainment, Bert was broke and out on the streets. He survived, alright. Some nights he would sleep on a bench, some nights he would sleep on the cold, hard pavement; some days he would eat, some days he wouldn't; some days he could panhandle a couple of bucks, some days he wouldn't have a penny. Bert knew he was no bum — he had been the leader of the great muppet kingdom — and with the taste of the gutter still in his mouth, he vowed that he would get back on top by whatever means.

By chance, while Bert sat slumped in a doorway while thinking this, a well-dressed man was walking by him and happened to glance his way. The man stopped dead, and his jaw dropped. "My God!" he exclaimed. "You're Bert the Muppet — one of the greatest comics of all time!"

"Yeah, you're right, Columbo," Bert replied, "what the hell's it to you?"

The man reached excitedly for his wallet, pulled out his card, and handed it to Bert. "I'd be honored if you'd be in a picture I'm producing, sir. Just show up at that address at 3 p.m. tomorrow, and I'm sure we can work something out."

Hungry and desperate for any new break at all, Bert had no alternative but to accept the offer. And that's how Bert the Muppet from Sesame Street became a porn star.

Bert went through hell during his time making pornos. They worked him like a machine, leaving him sore and exhausted after only a short while shooting. In order to keep his drive going, Bert resorted to using amphetamines; to bring himself down after filming, he took barbiturates; in between, he gobbled up acid like it was PEZ to escape from his life's harsh reality. Bert was now a junkie and a whore. In the end, before his mind snapped, Bert realized what he was doing to himself and knew there was only one way to save himself: he became

a follower of Elvis.

His baptism into the ways and teachings of Elvis occurred late one night when he returned to his ramshackle apartment after a grueling day's work. He turned on the T.V., hoping to catch either the Home Shopper's Club or kick-boxing on ESPN. But as Bert maniacally clicked through the channels, he came to the realization that Elvis had assumed control of the airwaves. Unbelievably, on every station — even the ones that used to have just static — was a re-run of "Clam-bake." Bert was mesmerized by the King's undying charisma and soon became caught up in the movie's message. It was then that Bert heard Elvis speaking to him, his words coming as if from the voice of God: "Ah, Bert, I have taken control of yoah television tonight to reach deep inside yoah soul and salvage the goodness that I know's in theah. I have chosen you to carry on the legacy of the King and to complete my unfinished work. I'm goin' now. Tell Priscilla I love her."

Bert awoke from his trance-like state, saying to himself, "So it was all just an hallucination. Wow! what a bad trip — I've gotta cut down on the drugs." He got up to go to the bathroom and to his amazement found that he was wearing a white, rhinestone-covered jumpsuit. Excitedly, he ran to the mirror and discovered that he had miraculously sprouted sideburns as thick as his eyebrow. He dropped to his knees next to the toilet and thanked Elvis for giving him another chance.

Heeding the King's call, Bert began working on his vocation almost immediately. He gathered around himself a group of fanatical followers who were anxious to spread the Word about Elvis and willing to accept Bert as their leader. Gradually, Bert inducted them into the lifestyle of his new "religion." He took them away to a remote camp where he initiated them into the ways and teachings of the King. Bert was seducing these and other young converts, organizing them into a dangerous cult called Muppets for Elvis, whose aim was to exterminate all non-believing fictional characters everywhere. He brainwashed new recruits into believing his perverse doctrines and led them on a zealous crusade of proselytizing from door to door. It was on one of these ventures, in the posh, exclusive community of Malibu, that Bert rang at one of the more luxuriant homes.

No sooner had the door opened than Bert became immediately and furiously enraged. "It's you! You red, satanic, mutant non-believer!" Bert screamed, teeth clenched and mouth foaming. Bert violently grabbed Ernie, his nerf-like victim and former partner. Here, in this unlikely situation, together again, the duo was reunited. There were no cameras or spotlights this time — just muppet versus muppet. The question was to be answered on that very spot, in this ultimate confrontation: which was the better muppet?

Trapped in Bert's clutches, Ernie had to think quickly. He

reached down and squeezed Bert's genital area with all his might. Bert let out a soprano-like yell of acute pain (and just a hint of pleasure). Then, Ernie closed the three fingers of his free hand to make a fist, recoiled his arm, and threw a right hook connecting with Bert's conical head. "Take that! you yellow, fanatical creep!" Ernie exclaimed as his blow sent Bert's nose somersaulting across the room like a giant, foam rubber Tic-Tac.

In an act of desperation, Bert butted Ernie squarely in the head, causing a deep indentation in the sponge-like surface of Ernie's cranium. With a heavy groan, Ernie released his vise-like grip and reeled back. Bert slumped to the ground, gasping for air, and lost consciousness.

He revived to find Ernie standing over him, saying, "Hey, Bert! Look what I got!" Bert was looking into the barrel of a .44 Magnum. With cat-like dexterity, Bert managed to grab his foe and, before Ernie knew what was happening, hurl him through a large, plate-glass window on the other side of the room. The broken glass cut Ernie's carpet-like exterior, causing the cottony stuffing to fall out of him in a billowy descent.

Ernie was now laying sprawled on his well-tended Malibu lawn. Bert, seeing his opportunity to finish off his fiendish opponent, grabbed the gun and leapt out onto the lawn, shoving the gun down Ernie's mouth. Bert looked at Ernie; Ernie looked at Bert. Their stares were deadlocked in mortal combat. Then, something clicked in Bert. He sighed and said, "I don't believe I've sunk this low — I've really hit rock bottom." He threw down the gun, saying, "I could never kill you — you were my partner, my friend, my buddy." Dejected and ashamed, he turned and began walking away.

From behind him he heard Ernie's voice call out, "Hey, Bert!" Bert spun around with the hope that Ernie was going to forgive him and take him back. But what he saw instead was Ernie, barely standing, aiming the Magnum right at Bert. It was then that Bert realized that he had been conned again — whether it was the last jelly bean or the moment of truth, just as always, Ernie won again. With the pull of a trigger and a fiery blast, Bert's body exploded into thousands of puffy particles. Ernie laughed uncontrollably and said, "Bye-bye, Bert."

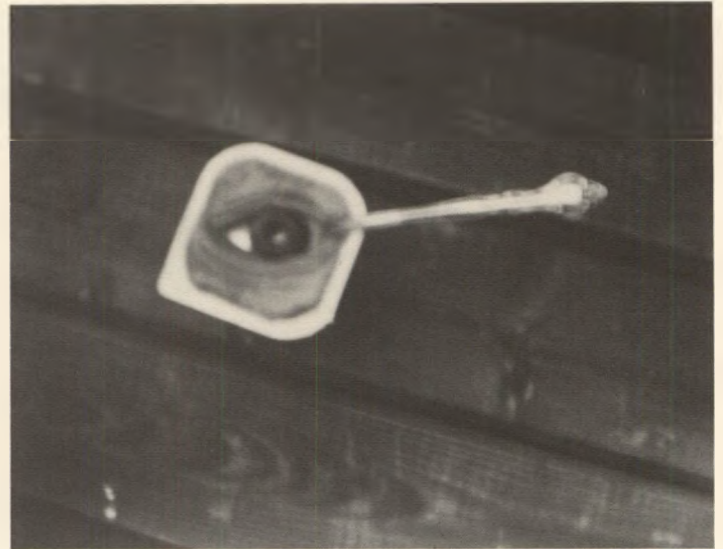
— Mike Clinton  
Rich Mascarelli



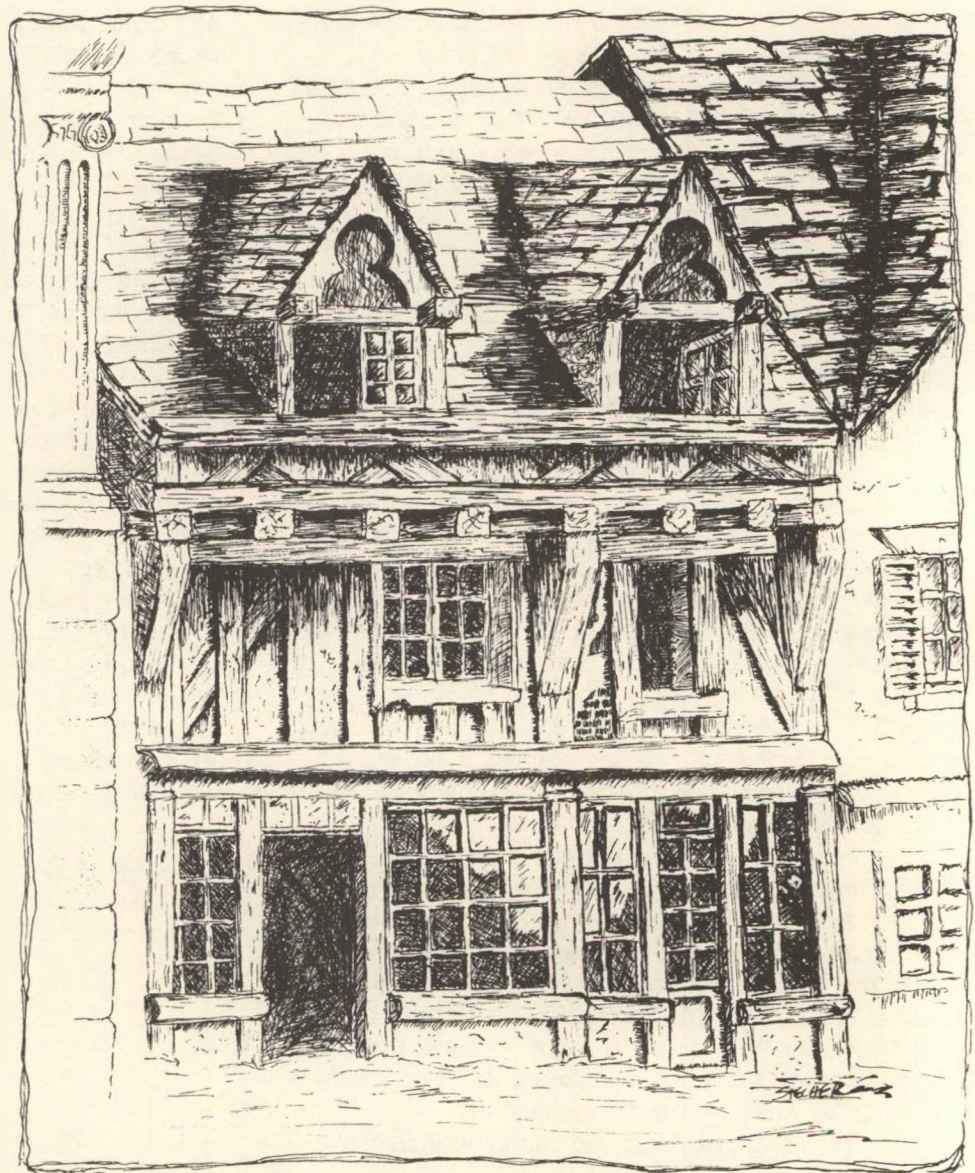
## I Corinthians 13:4

It's late again as  
I watch over the street —  
A harpy, perched, ready to pounce  
on shadows and strain them into you.  
A skinny street kid has your form  
for a moment,  
but turns full in the lamplight to mock me,  
Locked in my room,  
At my window  
Waiting...  
For you to lumber in with this evening's innocence.

— Terri M. Burke

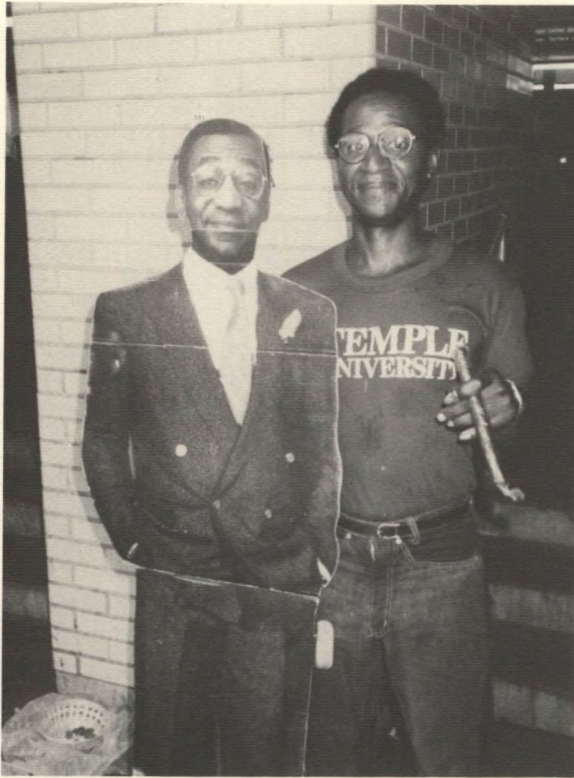


— David Livewell

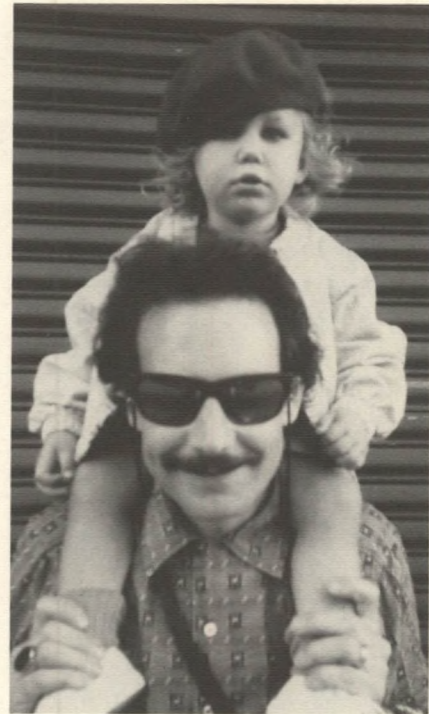


— Matt Stecher





— David Livewell



— David Livewell

## After the Funeral

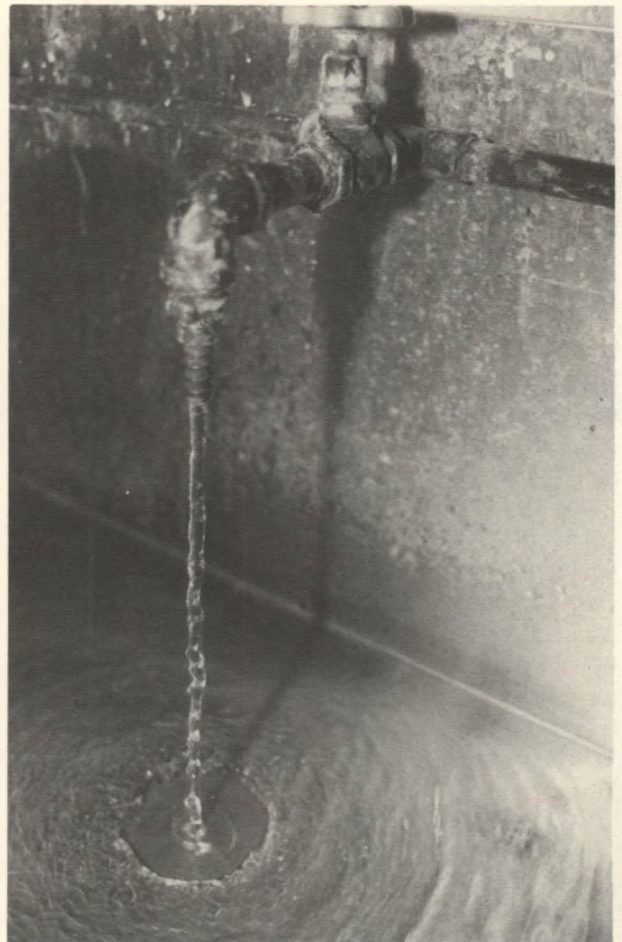
You see, we want to apologize for so much,  
in ourselves and in the world.  
But there isn't time for those words.

We both felt the same tiredness in the kitchen,  
when one flower pressed his face against  
the window and looked in, turning away from the sun.  
That flower was dying, and no words were said,  
because no thoughts came for a long five minutes  
alone together.

And we want to do so much more with our frailties  
than merely endure.  
But the machinery of skeleton and tongue can fail.

But then you said something small,  
and we picked up the moment like something  
we had dropped, and everything was okay  
because nothing had ever really been wrong.  
You even smiled and said my name,  
touched me; while the flower actually died.

— Thomas Hempstead



— Kim Saab



## The Writer

Once upon a time there lived a man who wanted to be a writer. But he could not think of anything to write, and he spent long nights with a pen in his hand, staring at blank pages. He lived in a third floor apartment in the city, and he would often sit by his window and look at the street below hoping to find a story there. One night just before dusk, he happened to see a little girl crying on the front steps of her home. "Why is she crying?" the writer wondered. "Maybe her big brother has gone off with his friends, and he won't let her play with them because she is too young." With this as a beginning, the writer sat down at his desk and started to write. The words came easily, and he did not have to think about them. Before long, the story was complete. He read it over and decided not to change a word. "Thank you, little girl!" he called out the window, and his heart was glad.

Each night the sequence was repeated. The writer would sit by his window and watch the little girl until a story appeared in his head. Then he would go to the table and write as effortlessly as before. On the nights when the girl did not appear, the man found he was unable to write anything. He would sit at his desk as before, staring at the blank sheet until late in the evening. However, the next night, if the girl reappeared, he would once again write with ease.

This continued for some time. Soon, the writer had enough stories about the little girl to be published. He sent them off and eagerly awaited a reply. When one came, it said his book would soon be published. The writer was overjoyed, and he danced about his apartment until the people below him pounded on their ceiling. When the book appeared, the writer pasted all the good reviews in his scrapbook. The book sold enough to pay for the rent, the food, and the paper, and the writer was happy. He continued to write about the little girl outside his window, and periodically, he published more volumes.

After three years, the writer's good fortune changed. The little girl across the street moved away. For a time, the writer tried to write stories about the other children on the block, but it was no use. He could only write about the little girl, and now that she was gone, he could not write at all. Once again, he was spending long, lonely nights in front of a blank sheet of paper, accomplishing nothing. Soon, he admitted defeat and lived sadly off the profits of his earlier success.

Many years passed, and the writer became an old man. He still lived in his third floor apartment, and he still spent his evenings sitting by the window, watching the children below. One day, there was a knock on his door. This was highly unusual, for the writer was a private man with few friends. When he opened the door, a pretty, young woman entered the room. He stared at the vaguely familiar face, and his eyes lit up like matches when he realized who it was.

"Why, you're the little girl who used to live across the street!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I am," she answered, then she held up a book. The writer recognized it as one of his own. He was about to tell her that he had written the stories about her when she said, "I stumbled upon this at the bookstore, and when I read it, I couldn't believe my eyes. How did you know?"

"What?" The old man was confused. "How did I know what?"

"All of this," she said, paging through the book. "The time I ripped my new dress; the time my dog ran away; the time my brother wouldn't let me play with him... All of it. How did you know?"

This was too much for the old man to take in. He sat down and stared ahead of him. "But I didn't," he said slowly. "I made it all up. None of it was real."

The woman did not understand. "But it's all exactly as it happened! You must have..." She too sat down and tried to comprehend the impossibility of what had happened. The stories contained everything, not just the events of her childhood but her most secret thoughts and feelings as well. It was incredible, but... After a moment of consideration, she turned to the old man with a proposition.

"I've lived a very unhappy life," she said. "The only happy times I can remember are those times you wrote about... those times you created in your stories. When you stopped writing about me, everything fell to pieces. You've got to start again. Write wonderful things. Make me happy. Give me everything my life is missing."

The old man did not understand. "But what could your life be missing?" he asked. "You're young and beautiful."

"It's just... something. Something I had and then lost. I don't know. None of my dreams came true."

The writer felt somehow responsible. After all, hadn't he given the little girl her ambition and confidence? If her life had failed to meet her expectations, hadn't he given her those expectations? "All right," he said. "I'll do my best." The young woman was overjoyed, and she spent the night describing the ideal life she wished to lead.

Each evening after this, the woman would come to the man's apartment for a few hours and paint, cook, or read while the writer sat and wrote. The words came as easily as before, and the man was very happy. He was no longer lonely, and he could write again.

Following the woman's outline, the old man wrote stories in which the woman became successful in a new job and made many new friends. The woman was delighted. Each night she related the good fortunes of the day. The writer was glad to see her so fulfilled. Eventually, the writer wrote of a wonderful man who worked with the woman. He then wrote about their blossoming romance, and soon the woman was coming to the apartment and describing just what he had written. When the time seemed right, the writer wrote a story in which the young woman married this man. The writer attended the ceremony, and everyone wondered who he was.

Soon after this, the woman's visits became less and less frequent. They dwindled to once a week, then once a month, then not at all. The woman was happy and did not need any more stories, but the writer was sad. He missed the woman's companionship. He sat in his apartment, and he was lonely.

One day, it occurred to the writer that he could write a story in which the woman returned to him. Then, he thought, "Why stop there? I could divorce them and marry her myself, and she would be just as happy if I write that it is so!" However, as



soon as he thought this, he was horrified. He knew it was wrong to manipulate people for his own base desires. He tried to put the thought away, but it kept returning. "This incredible power," he thought, "what right have I to use it as I please? What would become of the husband?" Still, the thought persisted and gnawed away at him. Though he knew the whole thing to be selfish and immoral, his desire was too great.

The old man went to his paper and started to write. The young woman was not there to inspire him, but this time the writer had a story already in mind. The words came slowly, but they came. He wrote a story in which the woman and her husband get divorced. Then he waited restlessly.

A month went by. The writer has trouble sleeping. Several times he considered writing a story about the woman's reconciliation with her husband, but he never did. Then, one day, there was a knock on his door. He opened it, and the young woman entered. Tears were flowing down her cheeks, "Why did you stop writing?" she asked. "Why?"

"You stopped coming to see me!" he returned. "What could I do? Why, child? What has happened?"

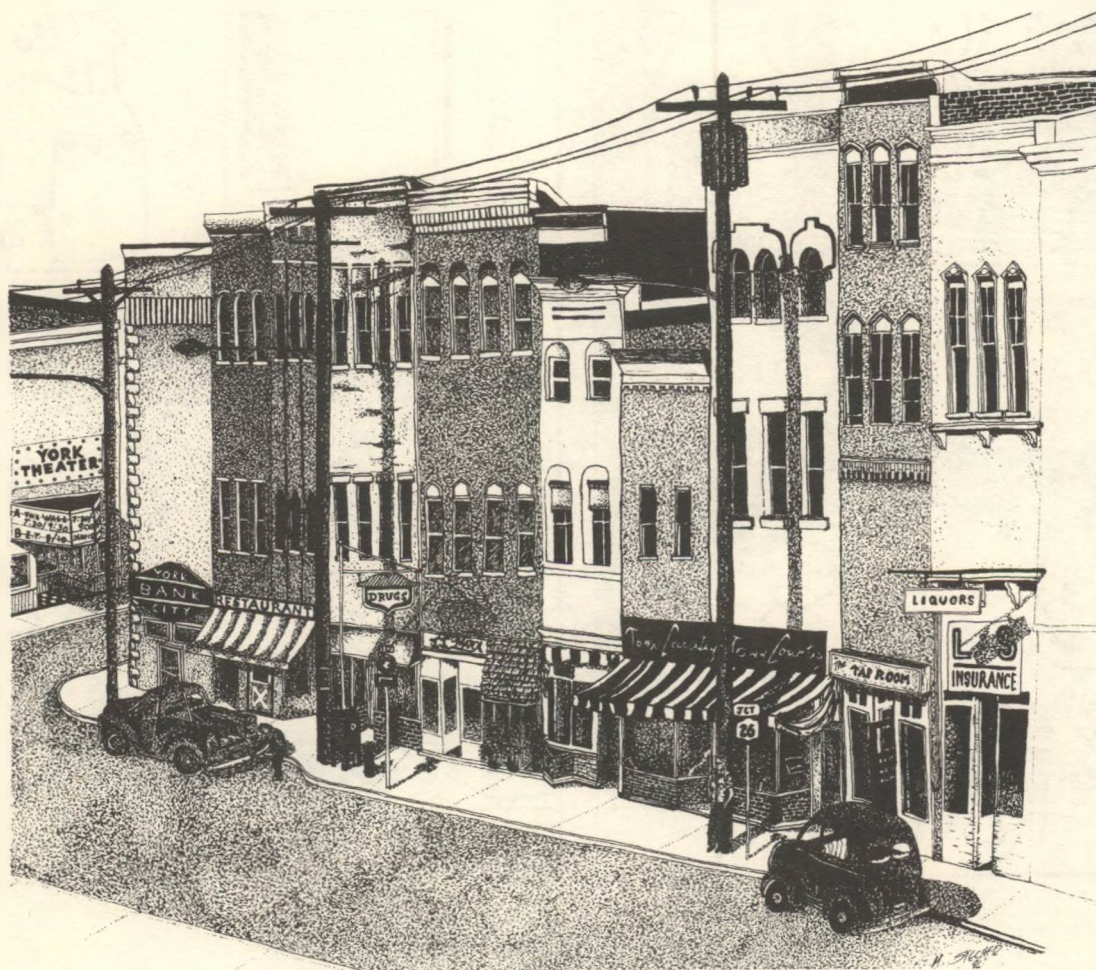
She flung herself on the old man's couch. "We've gotten a divorce," she said. The writer consoled her. Seeing her now, his desire increased, and as soon as the woman went home, the man went back to his paper and wrote. He wrote about her falling in love with him. Before long, this happened. Later, he wrote about their marriage, and this too came true. They were both very happy. The old man wrote a story about them moving into a large house in the country. When they did, the

woman said it was the most beautiful home she had ever seen.

One day, the woman was cleaning around the house when she came upon the writer's story about her divorce. Before she had a chance to read anything, the writer discovered what had happened. Tearing the pages from her hands, he explained that they were simply a rough draft of a failed story. He then left the room before the woman could pursue the matter further.

Unsettled by this narrow escape, the man decided to dispose of all his stories. One night, as his wife slept, the writer collected all of his papers together. He lit a large fire in the fireplace. Then, he tossed the entire pile in at once and watched it burn. As the flames rose and gained power, a scream emerged from the woman's bedroom. The man ran up the stairs, flung open the bedroom door, and found his wife lying on her bed. Rushing to her side, the man was horrified when he touched her cold, lifeless form. "What have I done?" he moaned. Desperately, he ran back down to the fireplace and tried to salvage some of the papers, but he was too late. He rushed to his desk and tried to write a story to counteract everything, but he was unable to form letters with his pen. The man sat at the desk for a long time, pathetically scribbling as the fire cackled behind him.

— Brian Bennett

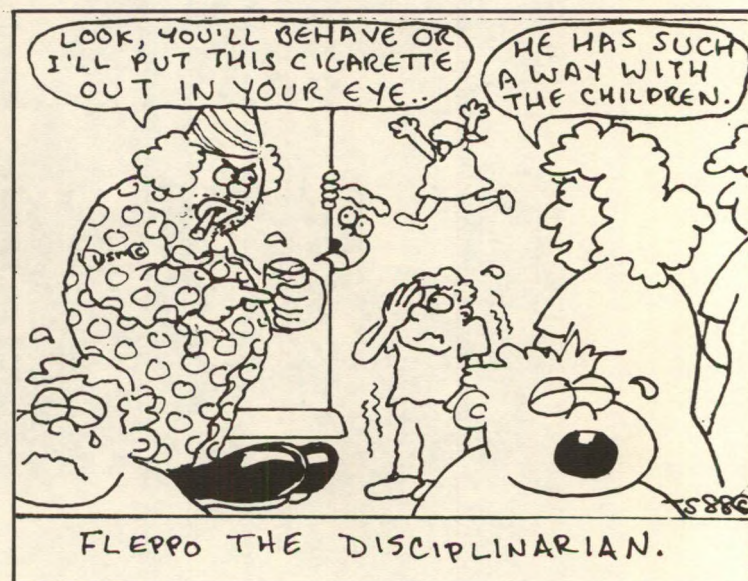
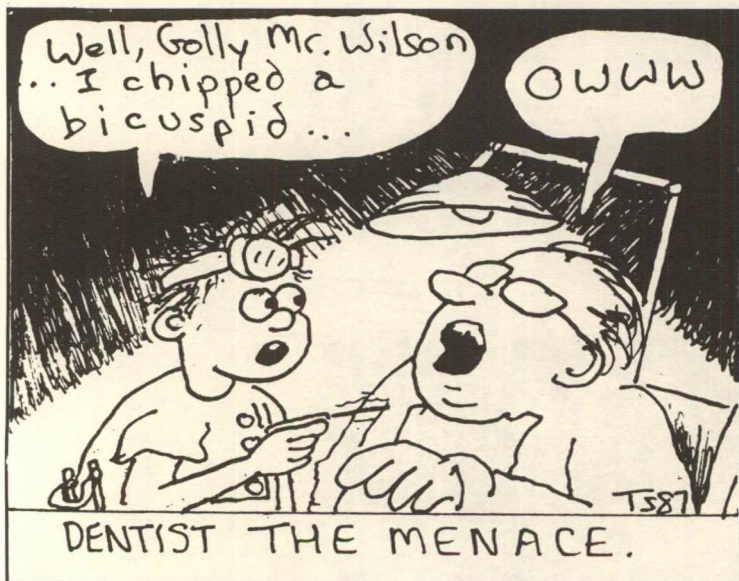
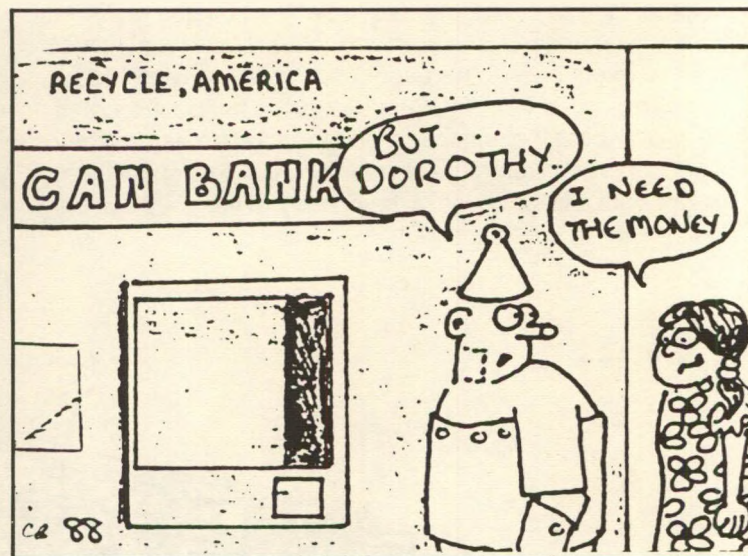
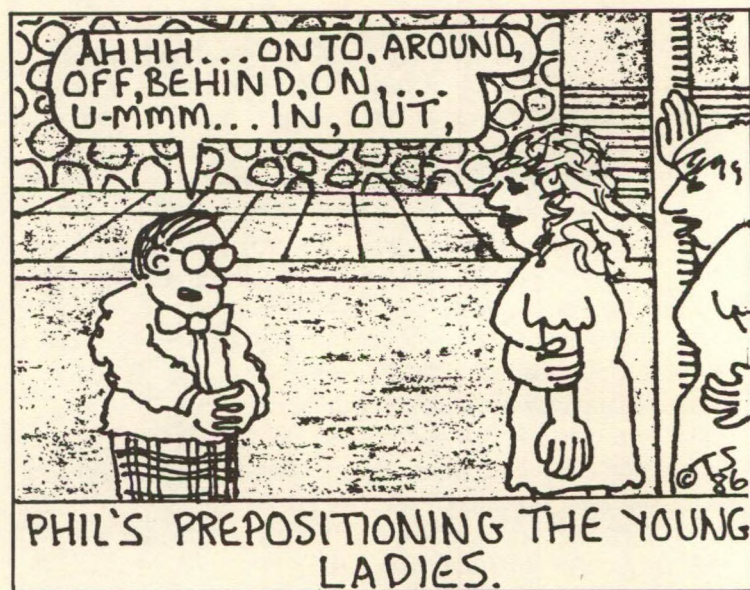


— Matt Stecher



# Corner Connections...

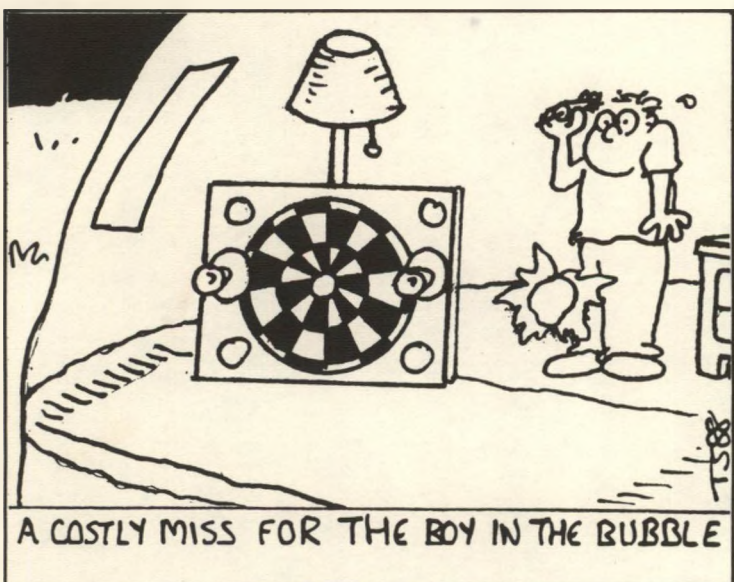
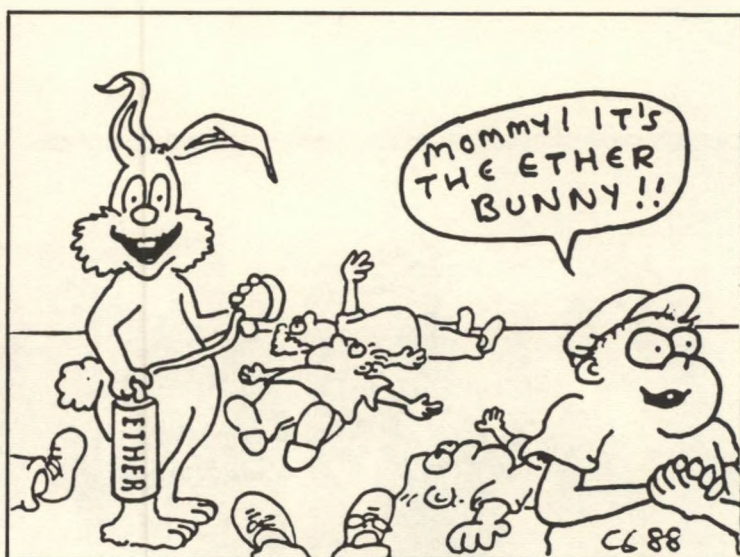
— Chris Gorman  
and  
Tom Stiglich







ROSA PARKS PLAYING MUSICAL CHAIRS.



A HALLMARK FAMILY PICNIC.



Torn from the Italian art book  
 scattered on the floor  
 Michelangelo, da Vinci, Botticelli, lay dead.  
 Voices from La Bohème wailed loudly  
 while Alfonso's glasses watched, laying to rest on the shelf.

The opera ended,  
 leaving Tchaikovsky's "Sleeping Beauty Waltz" to sound  
 on that victrola in my mind  
 "I danced with you once upon a dream"  
 Alfonso appeared in front of me wearing his black coat  
 and the hat he never left home without;  
 he squeezed my cheek, whispering,  
 "Bella faccia"  
 and danced the waltz with me before he went.

— Marysa Van Patten



— Carolyn Aversano



— Kelly Barten

## Early Autumn

Breeze  
 and the  
       soft  
           downward  
 flutter  
       of  
       flaxen leaves  
           caress the air  
 then land on the green tundra,  
       where they wait...  
                   patiently

— Edward Pettit

## Blessed Youth

Indifferent anguish, negotiable wrath  
Paper-thin ties, dry emotional bath  
A negligent error, a silver-plate spoon  
Self-mirrored asylum, disposable soon  
The dramatized life on an untarnished chain  
What do they know about pleasure and pain?  
Draining some energy, wasting some time  
Monotonous cliffs are not easy to climb  
"Nothing is sacred but everything's gold"  
To them, antique means nothing but old  
Nothing but innocence, nothing but guilt  
A sword's nothing edge driven in to the hilt  
The cruel trick of nature, societal curse  
Don't hold your breath Kids, it only gets worse

— Tracey Hassell



— Carolyn Aversano

## (You probably don't want to know this, But)

There he is —

that's Death

In the mock silk embroidered

two-piece pajama.

He chews on a banana ("Dole"fully, you pun),

At the end is the trigger and

Off you go...

There she is:

That is Death

Who chews,

gnaws

on your mind, denouncing

your house-trained dog,  
your over-stuffed chair,  
your new-improved laundry and the dustballs in the attic;

She closes in,

Pushing back mounds of polyester hair

as she goldenly slips out the pin. Off you go.

(Here is your answer to "What is Death?")

— Sonya K. Senkowsky



From across the street, Jay watched the house on the corner. The only light in the dark silhouette came through a second floor window. If he remembered correctly, that was the bedroom. He wasn't sure, though; it'd been so long.

Rain misted down, cool and dark. He wore a raincoat, but still felt a damp chill invade his bones. He coughed, wincing at the salty soreness in his throat. Pneumonia, he thought ruefully, that too now.

A shadow fluttered past the curtained window. He wondered if that was her. Perhaps a lover. Or maybe a husband. She might not even live there anymore. It'd been a long time. Her number was unlisted and he'd lost it in the shuffle of living life. The odds weren't good. The only way of knowing was to knock at the door.

She'll be there, he allowed himself this hope. She was always there before — she'll be there now. She had to be.

He pushed his damp hair back from his forehead and stepped off the curb. A quick, tiny flame daggered into his left ribs, and he leaned against the lamp post to steady himself. Warm wetness crawled across his skin; he'd reopened one of the wounds. He sucked air through his teeth and quickly lurched across the street.

As he climbed the slick porch steps, his toe hooked on the top one and he stumbled, feeling his flesh tear a bit more. "Fuck!" he muttered. The world flared bright red, yellow, then dull gray, threatening darker tones. Slowly, his vision cleared. He reached out and knocked on the door.

"Please, Beth, be there," he whispered. "Just be there."

The rain fell softly. He knocked again, harder. Behind him, the street was utterly black: the lamp shattered by vandals and the neighboring houses dark and asleep. No other cars had passed since the cab had dropped him off. It was somewhere past midnight, he knew. Chances of her opening the door this late to an unexpected visitor were remote.

He tightened and unclenched his fists, then knocked again.

In his head, he tried to conjure an image of her face, willing her to answer. It came surprisingly easy, and with it a memory of how it started.

They met in literature, between Salinger and Steinbeck. He'd been in the bookstore, using up some spare time on his lunch break. She'd been kneeling on the floor and stocking the bottom shelf, doing her job.

Jay had noticed her. In fact, she was why he was there in the first place. He found her attractive. She had long chestnut hair, which he liked immensely. Her face rounded nicely and looked easy to smile. As she kneeled, her skirt hitched up, revealing long tanned legs. Jay came to the conclusion she was attainable — pretty, not beautiful — and thus worth pursuing.

So when he reached for the copy of *Of Mice and Men* it was no accident that a few paperbacks slipped off the shelf. They cascaded down, flapping, and landed next to her feet. She looked up at him.

"Sorry," he said, grinning sheepishly.

"No problem," she replied also smiling. She picked up one of

the books. "*Of Mice and Men*, huh? Good book, but I feel sorry for Lenny."

Then it happened. It never ceased to amaze him, and he never understood how it worked (and why it worked only sometimes), how the connection was made, how two strangers could suddenly slip into conversation and start sharing thoughts like old friends. It was really unlikely, really strange, yet it happened.

They started talking about Steinbeck, then literature in general. Philosophy followed. From there, they somehow segued into films. Did she like Woody Allen? Couldn't get enough of him. Had she seen his new one? No, not yet, but she would love to sometime.

So they went together, and both had a good time, good enough to try it again. And again. Pretty soon the experiment became habit and they started seeing each other steadily and exclusively.

It lasted a little less than two years.

A light snapped on in the window next to the door.

"Who's there?" The voice was faint, muted. But he recognized it, he knew it.

"Beth, it's me. It's Jay."

In the short silence following, he thought himself lost. It's over. She's forgot. Or worse, she's remembered, and the pain and hate simply floated to the surface first.

Finally, after a heartbeat eternity, the door cracked open. A thin chain maintained the barrier.

"Jay?" Light framed her face. It perfectly matched the image he'd created moments before.

He straightened himself and tried a smile. "Hi."

"What do you want?"

"I need...you...your help," he paused, groping for an easy explanation. None offered themselves. "I...I hurt."

When the door slammed, he tottered and nearly fell. "No, don't!" he begged. But then it opened inward and warm light bathed him. She stood there, wearing a blue robe, long dark hair loose over her shoulders.

"Jesus, what happened?" He saw the conflicting emotions playing across her face: fear, anger, concern, love, and, yes, desire. A secret wish somewhere inside her had been fulfilled by his appearance. He felt guilty; she'd always felt it more deeply than he ever could.

"It's cold out here."

Beth shook her head. "I'm sorry. Come in."

She reached out to help him through the doorway, but he recoiled. "No!" She froze. Jay affected a softer tone: "It's okay; I can make it. Thanks."

Easy, he told himself, don't scare her off.

She looked at him queerly and moved aside, letting him enter. Water dribbled off his coat and onto the rug. He watched the white fabric slowly soak up the drops.

"Sorry."

"Well, here, give it to me. I'll hang it up."

He obeyed, gingerly slipping his arms from the sleeves. The pain was mostly gone now — it always faded quickly — but he



didn't want to risk any sudden movements.

As he gave her the coat, he could feel the nervous expectancy around her: she had questions. She didn't ask them, though; and hung the coat in the hall closet. When she passed him, Jay caught the scent of her hair: part shampoo, and part of that singular fragrance all hers. He'd forgotten about that, too.

"Okay if I use your bathroom?"

"It's down the hall, on the right."

"I know."

Jay turned and started toward the bathroom. He knew if he looked back now he would see her standing there, staring, slightly dazed by his abrupt invasion. Maybe coming to her had been a bad idea. But what choice did he have? None — she was his only hope, his only sanctuary.

He entered the bathroom, shut the door, and clicked on the light. It was immaculate, of course. Beth was a clean-freak. Everything had its place, and every place had its thing. God, how many arguments had they fought over something as trivial as an uncapped toothpaste tube? Just as much as she needed and desired tidiness, he abhorred it. He wasn't a slob; he simply couldn't abide such an obsession — the ridiculous attention to detail, the childish need to have the world "just perfect." It was enough to drive you insane.

He'd joke with her sometimes, saying her obsessive cleanliness had to be some sort of sexual hang-up. Then she would tilt her chin forward, smile wickedly, and say, "Sexual hang-up? Why, sir, I suffer no such thing! Go take a shower and I will show you."

He smiled at the memory, then looked across the bathroom. A corpse stared back at him. "Jesus..." he mumbled, stepping closer to the mirror. "You look like shit."

He did look bad. His skin shared the color of dough: pallid and shiny. A mangy growth of stubble coated his chin and cheeks. Bloodshot eyes. Disheveled clothes. Like something out of a cancer ward, he thought humorlessly.

He'd thought of cancer a lot during the past few weeks. But what the hell kind of cancer did this to you? He ran his hand across the left side of his abdomen, feeling the uneven texture of scarred skin through the shirt material. He looked at his palms. There was a dead numbness in their center.

No kind of cancer did this to you, he answered himself, and was even more frightened by that fact. What was happening to him?

He couldn't escape it, couldn't run from it any longer. That's what he had been doing: running. But it was no good. Like a dog trying to escape its own tail, he'd brought it with him. Now he was here, the last place to run to. Now he had to face it. But he needed time, and support, to prepare a strategy. Beth would give that to him. She had to.

He turned on the faucet and splashed warm water into his face. Drying his hands, he wondered what he should tell Beth. He had to offer some sort of explanation. What could he tell her? He might fabricate some story, spin a tale designed to elicit sorrow and pity, and thus her help. But she was too smart for that — she'd see right through it, and chase him from her home. This was ridiculous. He found himself trying to construct a lie less fantastic than the truth, attempting to understate an impossible reality.

"Fuck it," he muttered, tossing the towel aside and leaving the bathroom. He'd meet her without a prepared script and simply tell the truth.

She'd believe him — not like the others. He could count on her. Things between them might have soured, but they shared experiences which bound them: they had mutual pain, mutual scars. In the end, that was more potent than any illusions of love.

\* \* \*

To do something — to be occupied — Beth went into the kitchen and started making tea. It was boring and meaningless, but its very prosaic routine steadied her, gave her an anchor in the tumult of memories and emotions churning inside her.

Beth knew it would happen. In her heart, where all the secret, certain knowledge lay, she knew he would reenter her life sometime. He had to; life was not that neat; it was messy, and never made clean cuts.

She filled the kettle and put on the burner. From the cabinet next to the stove, she retrieved a cup and a tea bag.

What had it been? She knew exactly. Ten months last week. She remembered it lucidly, had replayed every detail over and over inside her head, only recently noticing the tiny clues and omens which he had strewn about their final weeks together. It's nearing the end, each sign said, each awkward conversation intimated, each unreturned call warned. Had she been more aware, more honest, she might have seen it coming and done something about it. She could have put distance between them and protected herself better. But she was blind and stupid, and had her insides torn out. Unexpectedly. Painfully.

She remembered. She called his apartment for over a week, leaving messages on the machine, begging him to get in touch with her. Of course there was no reply.

Then, two weeks after she had last spoken to him, she tried again. This time someone did answer.

"Hello?" The voice was exquisitely female: purring, softly modulated, with a slight hint of accent. Beth's mind automatically formulated a face for the voice. It was terribly pretty.

"Who is this?" Beth asked. She knew it was the right number; she'd dialed very carefully.

"Who is *this*?" the beautiful voice retorted.

Beth closed her eyes, swallowed hard. "Can I speak with Jay, please?"

"Just a moment." Then, muted slightly by distance: "Jay! Phone for you."

Even further away, his voice answered: "Who is it?"

"I don't know. Some girl."

"Ask who it is." His voice neared.

"Who's calling, please?"

She opened her eyes. Her vision remained misty and blurred. "It's Beth."

"Her name is Beth," the voice relayed. Across the line, very distinctly, she heard him mutter, "Shit..."

Then Beth hung up, slowly laying the receiver into its cradle.

She never heard from him again. Until tonight.



The kettle began whistling. She palmed away the tears and turned off the burner. Faintly, she heard the bathroom door open and the shuffle of his steps coming up the hallway.

She poured the hot water into the cup and put the kettle on a cold burner. When she finished stirring, he appeared at the doorway.

"The place looks nice," he said. "But then it always did."

"Thank you." He looked a little better, had a little more color, though not much. What had happened to him? More importantly, what was he doing here?

"I made you some tea," she said.

"Hey, thanks a lot." He seemed genuinely grateful.

"You can drink it in the living room." She led him there and set the cup down on the table in front of the sofa. He took a seat. She sat down in a straight-backed chair against the far wall.

He sipped the tea. "It's very good."

Beth was acutely aware of their positioning in the room: him on one side, her on the other. So this was what it had come to, she thought, two strangers nervously eyeing each other. Just as easily as they slipped into intimacy, they'd slipped out. But now she carried the emotional deadweight of nagging memories. Fuck Tennyson — it wasn't better to have loved and lost than not at all. The innocent didn't have to deal with broken promises.

"What are you doing here, Jay?" asked Beth.

Jay grinned. "That's the way to do it, Beth. Cut through the bullshit, right?"

"Exactly. It's late and I'm tired and I need a reason for you being here."

"Sorry." He exhaled heavily, tiredly. "All right. Let's try it."

Beth watched him pull up his shirt off his stomach. Below his left ribs the material stuck to the skin and he had to give it a tiny yank to free it. As the shirt hitched up, she saw the adhesive was dried blood. The dark material had prevented her from noticing before — that and a million other distractions. Rust-colored blood smeared his abdomen, from navel to nipple. In its center was a puckered white scar.

Beth leaned forward. "Jesus! Are you okay? Were you stabbed?"

Jay put up his hand. Immediately, she saw the pale scar in the center of his palm. She slowly fell back into her chair.

"It's okay; don't worry. It's old blood." He smiled grimly. "It doesn't hurt."

Beth closed her eyes and gently pressed her fingers against the lids. She felt enormously tired. From within the darkness, she asked, "What is going on, Jay?"

"I don't know." He let the shirt drop over his stomach again. He began staring at his hands, closely examining them as if he wasn't sure they were his. "You remember my dad, right? Remember how sick he was?"

Opening her eyes, Beth nodded. She remembered visiting him once with Jay. He was a sweet old man — he called her "kiddo." During their dinner together, he turned very pale and fled to the bathroom. After checking on him, Jay had driven her home. He didn't speak at all on the trip.

"Well, he got worse. I took him to the doctor. Stomach cancer. Pretty far gone. They had to operate." Jay's hands wrestled in his lap, trying to warm each other. Fascinated, he

watched their maneuvers.

"The night before the surgery, I visited him in the hospital. He looked horrible. Pale and sunken, like his body was wax and they had put him inside the flames. But his eyes were still clear. Trapped within this dying body, he was still alive, still wanting life. He looked at me and... Jesus, you could see he knew it hopeless. Even with the operation, his chances were almost nothing.

"When he looked at me, I saw the fear. I could feel how terrified he was. My dad. My dad was scared! My dad couldn't do anything. He wanted me — me! — to do something, to stop his fear and make everything all right, to save him!"

Jay looked up at Beth, his eyes frantic. He blinked, smiled, pulled himself away from the memory a bit. When he continued, his voice was low, calm.

"I reached out and held his hand. What else could I do? Then it happened. I felt hot, real hot. I started sweating down my back, under my arms, everywhere. My mouth dried out and filled with a bitter taste. There was this tremendous... I don't know... energy, I guess. Something. At first I thought it came from him. But it was me. My dad's eyes bulged. His grip tightened on my hand. He was scared.

"The heat grew worse, hotter, more intense, eating into my guts. Then the blood came. Lots of blood. Blood everywhere. Coming from me. From my hands, feet, from my side. It just poured out of me.

"My dad began making weird sounds now, moaning, his eyes closed, his neck arched back, rising. I looked around at my blood on his hand, on his bed sheets, and I got up and ran. Ran out of his room, down the hall, and into the bathroom. I turned on the water and started washing my hands, washing the blood away. After a while, it ended, but the scars remained."

"You were bleeding. You were in the hospital. Didn't you go see a doctor?" Beth asked.

Jay shook his head. "No. You see, it didn't hurt. At least not afterwards. During it, yes, it hurt. But then it was over and all I had left were the scars. And I was scared. Christ, wouldn't you be? I didn't know what the hell was going on. Too much was happening; everything was fucked up. I couldn't think straight. Do you understand?"

Beth shrugged. She crossed her legs and the robe slipped open, exposing inner thigh. She quickly adjusted herself.

He didn't notice. Or if he did, hid it well, continuing his tale. "After cleaning up, I returned to his room. He was asleep now. The blood was there. Not much — a few drops on his hand and blanket — but there, and real."

"What happened to your dad?"

Jay's eyes wandered the room uncertainly, as if searching for something. They finally settled on the window and probed the blackness beyond. His fingers massaged the scars.

"He died," he answered, staring. "The next day was his operation. I waited at the hospital. The operation was supposed to take a couple hours. After an hour, the surgeon came out, shaking his head. He died on the table.

"He had some sort of reaction to the anesthesia, went into convulsions, and had a heart attack. They had him open when he went. The damndest thing, the surgeon told me, he couldn't find the tumor. They were looking for it when he had the



attack. Seemed like it disappeared, the surgeon said."

Jay's head jerked. He glared at Beth. "Do you get it? The fucking cancer didn't get him! He died, but not because of the cancer! It was gone! It didn't get him!"

"You mean to say —"

He stopped her. "Let me finish. I know it all sounds like bullshit, but let me finish. That's all I ask. Okay?"

Reluctantly, she nodded. He was correct — it was all bullshit, which he suggested, and offensive bullshit at that. But he told it with... with such earnestness. She knew him well enough to know he rarely lied, and when he did it was easy to spot. Now she didn't know.

"It happened again a few weeks later. With Julie, this time."

"Julie?"

He recognized his mistake. "She came after you."

"Oh."

"About a year before she met me, she'd been raped in her apartment. It screwed her up pretty bad. I was the first guy she had dated. She told me it was over, in the past, but that was a lie. Everytime I touched her, she tensed, like I had scales.

"And she had nightmares — bad ones. She'd wake up in the middle of the night, screaming — really screaming — like she was dying."

He had returned to staring at his hands. Now the words flowed from his lips almost without inflection. He seemed drained, numb, there only in body, and then only tenuously. She desperately wanted to see his eyes, but they were hidden in shadow beneath his brow. Beth recalled a line of Dylan Thomas, something about birds singing in the eaves of an asylum. Looking at Jay, she felt an involuntary shiver creep up her spine.

"Then one night she had her dream again. I woke her up, holding her. Then it happened, just like before. The heat, the blood and pain. And again I ran. Out of her bedroom, out of her house, and into my car, bleeding all the way. I drove away.

"After that, she didn't have anymore nightmares. It happened five more times after that," he finished, voice disintegrating into a low whisper. After what seemed a long time, he looked up at Beth, expectantly.

She drew in a long, shuddering breath and focused on him. Her head ached. It felt stuffed with paper: dry, crinkling, loud. "Jay, are you trying to tell me you healed these people? That this...these scars are some form of stigmata? Do you think yourself a saint, Jay? Or maybe you've gone beyond that. Are you Jesus Christ?"

She regretted saying it, but had to. She could see it hurt him. Didn't he see it hurt her, seeing him like that? What had happened to him? When had he lost touch with reality? Did his father's death birth this grand illusion? And why had he returned to her?

Jay stared at her for a few moments in disbelief, then exploded. "Goddamnit, I'm not saying that! Fuck you, bitch! Jesus...Beth!" He rose, his knee striking the table and spilling the tea. He halted, looked down at the mess, and shook his head. His hands moved aimlessly. "Look, I'm sorry about that. I'll clean it up. Jesus, I'm sorry."

Frowning, Beth stood up, went into the kitchen and returned with a towel. She knelt down and began to wipe at the rug,

but it was too late; the material had already soaked it. The rug was white; it would stain.

Jay stood there awkwardly, watching her. He said, "Beth." She ignored him. "Beth," he repeated, voice soft and careful.

Scrubbing, she looked up at him, eyes dark and intense. "What?"

"I'm an atheist, you know that. I fucking hate religion. I don't think I'm a saint. I can't think anything because I don't know what's happening. All I know is, I'm real scared, more scared than I've ever been. You don't have to believe me. I don't care. But, with everything we had together — everything we went through together — you owe me more than that. I'm not a fucking nut."

There it was again — that earnestness, that need to just say his piece with a blithe disregard for its absurdity. It, like so many other pieces of him, caused a conflict inside her. One side, her rational mind, argued what he spoke was madness and to believe it would be equally insane. The other side, her heart, told her to believe and respond to the power with which he invested his words. The battle raged. "What do you want?" said Beth.

"I need a place to stay. Just for a while. So I can get a handle on things. I need some time away from everything, away from the people coming after me. Will you give it to me?"

A long time ago she had offered herself up to him. Now it was her turn. He'd betrayed her once. To give him another opportunity would be folly. To do otherwise might be equally painful. In the end, this conflict mattered not one bit. It was settled on the issue of practicality. It was late at night. She couldn't very well send him back in his condition into the cold night.

"You can stay here tonight," Beth answered. "We'll talk tomorrow about anything more."

He nodded. "Thank you."

In silence, they finished cleaning up. Then she brought out some blankets and spread them across the sofa — a makeshift bed.

Finished, she said good-night and left for her bedroom.

She paused at the foot of the stairs, turned back to him. "Jay, why?"

"I told you: I needed a place to stay."

"That's not what I meant."

"I know," he said, and left it at that.

\* \* \*

She knew it hopeless, but made the attempt anyway. Sleep wouldn't come. Beth lay in her bed, listening to the soft rhythm of the falling rain, staring at the darkness hiding the ceiling. Her mind kept conjuring memories — the damned memories — to project on the black canvas. At first she fought the urge, but, seeing it useless, then surrendered to it, giving the past license to live again. The memories played, each a little one-act drama designed to recall a particular facet of their time together, each offering her a different shade of emotion.

At first it was pleasant — only good experiences and times. But then it slowly, inexorably slid toward the darker areas: the pain and anger — scars.

As it crept over her, she wondered where his dreams had led him.



\* \* \*

He didn't want to. Neither did she, not really, to be honest. But she pushed for it anyway. Sex would be a protest, an act of defiance that nothing was wrong, that everything would be fine and soon return to normal. It wouldn't of course, but she had to make the attempt at least. It was the only defense against the horrible realization that her own life had become a prison.

Fast and furious, it thankfully ended soon. Neither derived much pleasure from it and afterwards they lay in the dark bedroom, kitten-weak, listening to the slow leveling of the other's breath.

"When's your appointment at the clinic?" he asked.

"10:30."

"I'll pick you up at ten tomorrow, then, okay?"

"Fine."

An uneasy silence fell between them like a glass wall.

"Jay?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm scared."

He reached out for her hand, found it, and squeezed it tightly. "It's okay," he said meaninglessly. "It'll be okay. You'll be fine. It's for the best."

They lay like that for a long while, the wall erected again. Then she rolled over on her side, back to him, facing the wall. He couldn't distinguish her body from the darkness of the room. Finally, she said, "How do you think you'll die?"

"What?"

"I said: How do you think you'll die?"

"Stop it, Beth."

"Stop what?" Her voice sounded utterly innocent.

"What you're doing."

"Why?"

"It's stupid. And a waste." Despite earlier promises to himself, he felt anger, dark and hateful, bubbling up inside him. She had every reason to be this way...but he didn't want to deal with it. Not right then.

"I know how I'm going to die," she spoke softly, barely a whisper.

"For Christ's sake, knock it off!"

"I'm going to die of loneliness."

Then there was an eternal moment when the words hung there, reverberating and echoing soundlessly. Then she rolled back and faced him, and he hugged her, burying his face into her neck. She felt the warmth of his tears against her neck.

"I love you." His voice was muffled.

"I do, too," she answered, and started to cry.

In the darkness, they held each other.

\* \* \*

After an uneasy, dreamless sleep, Beth woke early the next morning. The rain had stopped, but the sky was still overcast. The light filtering through the window looked stale. It reflected her perfectly. She felt dirty, sluggish, hung-over.

Too much had happened last night, too much to think about and decide. All she wanted to do was pull the blankets around her and slip quietly back to sleep, to retreat into the com-

fortable darkness. But she knew that impossible. She had to get up, go downstairs and greet both her past and future.

With an enormous effort she left the bed and went into the bathroom. Quickly, she washed and brushed her teeth. She had arrived at a decision. He wanted sanctuary from her, a place to stay. She had given it to him. For one night. To give him anymore, to have him stay longer, she thought, would cause more conflicts than it would resolve. Better to have him deal with his problems — his delusions — somewhere else. She no longer had responsibility for him; it was out of her hands. They were in love once; now they weren't. It was that simple.

This new found clarity fueled her determination. She would go downstairs, make him breakfast, and then tell him to leave. Yes, she would do that.

When she went downstairs, she found him still asleep. During the night, he had kicked away the blankets and now had only his crossed arms to warm himself in the chill morning air. She picked up the blankets and covered him again. Looking down upon his sleeping form, the slow rise and fall of his chest, his slightly parted lips, his complete trust and innocence, she felt her conviction fleeing from her to be replaced by a misty world of indecision and memories. Beth hated that world.

She touched his hand. His skin felt cold, so cold, not at all like the hands which had caressed and held her before.

"You bastard," she murmured, closing her eyes. Tears glazed her cheeks. "Why did you come back? Why did you leave? It hurt — it hurts! I loved you." She became aware of the rising volume of her voice and halted it. She could lament and demand all she wanted, but in the end it didn't matter. All of it was pointless.

She touched his hand. Static warmth raced up her arm, through her body, searing, balm. Her vision faded and her muscles tightened, relaxed. She didn't breathe. All, in an instant. Time froze, ran backward, slow at first, then faster, too fast, through memories — sensations and thoughts — to a moment of pain. Her fingers trembled, sank into his flesh. Her vision returned and she saw the wound erupting around the tips, saw the blood flowing. Quickly, she pulled away, instinctively wiping her fingers on her shirt, leaving a red smear.

Only afterward did she realize he had healed her.

He had woken, of course. In the second it'd taken for it to happen — for her to steal life and deposit pain in return — he was awake. But it was too late — the damage done.

Beth swayed unsteadily. She saw him, saw his wide, accusing eyes, saw him fleeing away from her like a betrayed child.

Yes, she thought, he could stay now.

For a while.

"There is a no lack of love in the world, but there is a profound shortage of places to put it."

Theodore Sturgeon

— Stuart Somershoe





— Matt Stecher

## Bird

Feathers  
quiver  
on the wind  
and bullet  
into a  
blue blur

— Edward Pettit



## Alcoholic Graffiti

For W. H. Auden

### I. The Invocation

No matter how a poet tries  
Old Plato says he only lies,  
But Plato never had to write  
An epic poem in one night —  
A shortened deadline's hard to keep,  
And most ghost writers don't come cheap.  
Besides, a poet can distort,  
Long as he settles out of court,  
And poets *should* all spread Confusion  
(This is why we have allusion).  
Thus, a poem's words can make no sense,  
Long as they're written in one tense.  
In fact, before he writes a letter,  
The less the poet knows the better:  
If poets question and don't answer,  
Then Doubt spreads like benignant cancer,  
And Doubt will help the poet's case  
If he should fall from legal grace,  
Since Doubt obscures the grounds for libel,  
As well as lying on the Bible,  
And makes him a convincing pleader,  
Proving he's as clueless as the reader.  
For this, a poet needs vermouth  
And soon enough he's writing truth.  
For with a shot — well, more or less —  
He writes opaque, poetic mess  
And learns more convoluted knowledge  
Than he would learn at home or college.  
Vermouth, Oh Muse! inspire my lines,  
Stout Mona Lisa of the wines,  
For though Bordeaux remains more sung over,  
With you, Oh Muse! I've been more hung over.  
So let my humble theme be boundless  
(It matters little if it's groundless),  
And I will mount like great religions  
Upon the sacred wings of pigeons;  
My theme will soar as high as Plato's  
And be fulfilling as potatoes;  
For I will sing of human kind,  
And if they have, or lack, a mind.  
So twinkle, twinkle, little bottle,  
As I ponder Aristotle,  
Nietzsche, Hume, and Socrates,  
While I drink you to the lees.

### II. The Poem

Genet contends all humans are psychotic,  
But Midas found they're closer to a donkey;  
While old Dean Swift was probably neurotic  
And thought he was the brother of a monkey.  
But Darwin was the race's great defendant:  
He proved each person is an ape's descendent.

"In action like an angel," Hamlet said,  
But Hamlet never did a single action.  
And though Ophelia waited in his bed,  
He always slept alone with this abstraction:  
"To be and not to question: there's the rub;  
I would have had more luck inside a pub."

### III. The Digression

Before Geoff Chaucer passed away  
He cursed his sinful life, they say,  
And then he lived among the monks  
Who many say were pious drunks.

William Shakespeare  
Would drink his beer,  
With any spirit that would go well  
And so did Robert Lowell.

While drinking, Edgar Allan Poe  
Did not know  
That Shadows cannot walk,  
And Ravens cannot talk.

Whenever Tycho Brahe  
Would say a *faux pas* he  
Would cant about the stars  
And visit all the bars.

Omar Khayyam  
Had no aplomb,  
But with some wine  
He did just fine.

Sigmund Freud  
Was overjoyed,  
When he snuffed about an oke  
Of fine Egyptian coke.

Ernest Hemingway  
Was drunk the day  
He wrote *Farewell to Arms*.  
But did this bring him any harms?

John Millington Synge  
Said during a fling:  
"The only method, have no doubt,  
Is with both hands, when drinking stout."

Though Dylan Thomas drank  
Few said his poems stank.  
S — J — — is another case:  
His poems are a drunk's disgrace.



#### IV. The Poem (cont.)

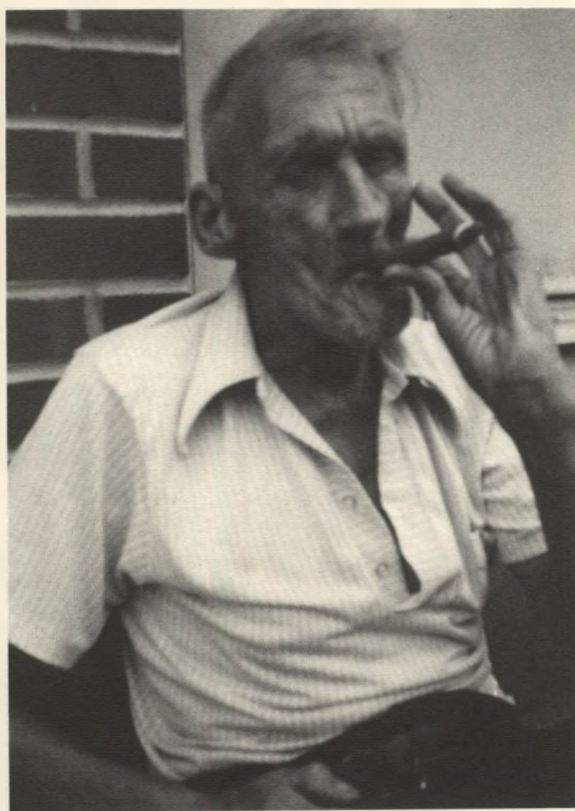
Since Torquemada was a good persuader,  
The Spanish Jews made only Christian homages,  
And Jenghis Khan was such a good invader,  
He never once was taken in for damages.  
But Caesar did the most for his society,  
By shunning works of cowardice and piety.

St. Joan of Arc, to keep her mind diverted,  
Began a war of English comminution.  
But Dandy Swinburne was a bit perverted:  
He is the patron saint of prostitution.  
They're married now, and Joan is still courageous,  
But Swinburne's scared to tell her he's contagious.

#### V. The Epilogue

Much like four buoys on an ocean,  
The walls about me are in motion:  
The room is sinking down, and going up,  
And for an hour, I've been throwing up.  
I'll give up wine! I've had enough  
And ain't gonna write no more this stuff.

— *Scott Jermyn*



— *David Livewell*



— *David Livewell*

#### The Visitors

Tonight the darkness  
finds the door again  
and enters without knocking.

Now the dead,  
blinded and bodiless,  
hover here like friends —  
repeating to themselves  
the words they've said  
through twenty or a hundred lifetimes,  
their tongues edged with a fire  
fainter than starlight.

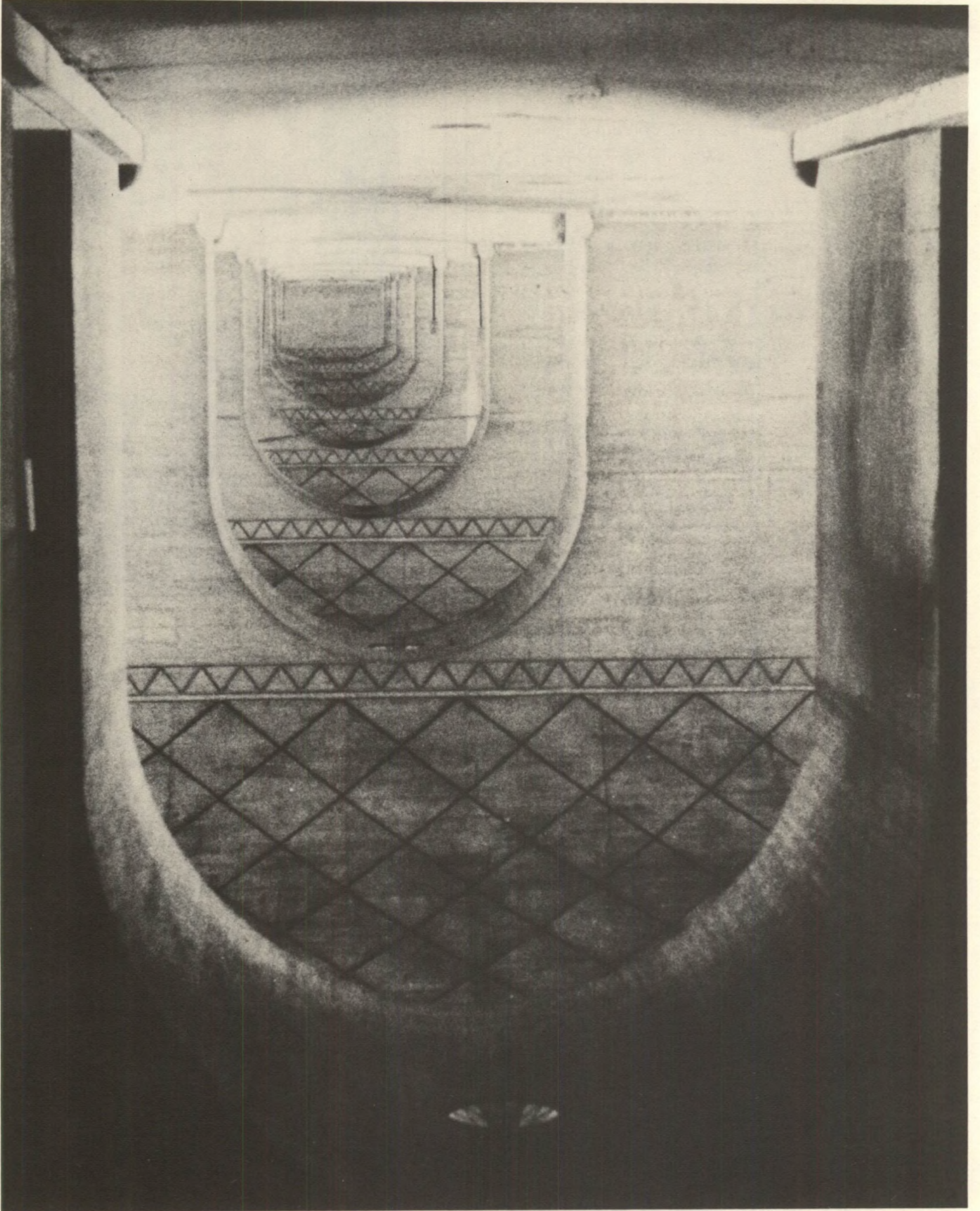
They gather lives  
like half-remembered songs,  
old melodies they never  
quite get right.

And entering our dreams  
they re-invent the past:

What river is this,  
what garden,  
what copper sunlight  
falling through the trees?

— *Frederick R. Bennett, Jr.*







## Poem

Here's another one for you.  
I'll have it ready in a minute — all lacquer and glitter  
and ready to go —  
we can sell it.

*but i have another one, in the front of my mind  
and don't you dare touch it*

Make it dance, but give me a penny  
or tomorrow I won't have any.

— Sonya K. Senkowsky



— Jim Hagen

## The Coffin Maker For N. H.

Final planks of wood were laid in place  
With skill; gauging hands — splintered and cracked  
In rings like trees that mark the years —  
Remained steady, quietly bearing the hours  
Below the hanging bulb. Shavings curled like leafage  
From tempered blades, forged by fire  
To never rust or dull. The dust of pine  
Settled on his hair, gold on silver.  
Cowled with remnants of his dying art,  
Stooped in reverence by each hammer stroke  
Wedging wooden pegs deep as the grain,  
He humbly crafted his own casket  
Embossed with pietas, lathed mahogany spires  
That pointed to a scrolled name on a lacquered, open lid.

— David Livewell

## Dream

When the mood is blank,  
And the wind yawns  
Wide as a window,  
And sleep hangs in  
The sunny drapery;

Dream then, fitfully,  
In your daylight room,  
Of the glorious, laughing embrace  
Of the darling darkness,  
And the liquor of merry green nights.

— Thomas Hempstead



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